

Published: June 28, 2017, Kokomo Tribune [Page: A4]

http://www.kokomotribune.com/opinion/house_of_burgess/house-of-burgess-i-didn-t-tape-comey-the-president/article_3e87c778-5b6f-11e7-8d65-2b9ce489c0fb.html



KT photo | **Tim Bath**

House of Burgess: 'I didn't tape' Comey, the president now says

Trump then: 'Comey better hope that there are no "tapes"'

By Rob Burgess
Tribune columnist

As these past weeks have confirmed, the answers given to inquiries swirling around the White House have only raised more questions.

As I wrote in my May 17 column, "Trump's 'Tuesday Night Massacre,'" President Donald Trump abruptly fired FBI Director James Comey May 9. The termination letter based the firing on the recommendation of Attorney General Jeff Sessions and Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein. Trump

repeatedly admitted Comey's Russian election meddling investigation was the true reason.

As I wrote in my May 24 column, "Trump himself the leaker of info," The Washington Post first reported Trump asked the director of national intelligence, Dan Coats, and Adm. Michael Rogers, the director of the National Security Agency, to publicly deny the existence of any evidence of Russian collusion. In Senate Intelligence Committee testimony June 7, Coats and Rogers refused to answer questions about these reports. In private, though, they confirmed the truth.

"[Coats and Rogers] told Special Counsel Robert Mueller's team and Senate investigators, in separate meetings last week, that Trump suggested they say publicly there was no collusion between his campaign and the Russians, according to multiple sources," reported CNN's Dana Bash, Evan Perez and Manu Raju Thursday.

As I wrote in my June 14 column, "Lordy, I hope there are tapes," that was the direct quote from former FBI Director James Comey during his June 8 testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee when asked about Trump's May 12 tweet that he "better hope that there are no 'tapes' of our conversations before he starts leaking to the press!" June 9, Congress demanded Trump turn over these "tapes." During a June 10 press conference in the Rose Garden, Trump promised to "tell you about it over a short period of time" whether such "tapes" existed at all.

The day before Congress' deadline, the president issued a carefully worded statement on Twitter. "With all of the recently reported electronic surveillance, intercepts, unmasking and illegal leaking of information, I have no idea whether there are 'tapes' or recordings of my conversations with James Comey, but I did not make, and do not have, any such recordings," he wrote Thursday.

Apparently, tweets don't constitute an official response to the House Intelligence Committee, so Marc T. Short, assistant to the president for legislative affairs, copied and pasted Trump's Thursday tweet into a letter addressed to Chairman Mike Conaway, R-Texas, and ranking Democrat Rep. Adam Schiff, California.

Also Friday, Trump appeared on "Fox and Friends" with co-host Ainsley Earhardt.

"You never know what's out there, but I didn't tape and I don't have any tape," Trump said. "But, when he found out that there may be tapes out there, whether it's governmental tapes or anything else, and who knows, I think his story may have changed. ... And my story didn't change. My story was always a straight story. My story was always the truth."

One tape that definitely doesn't exist is of Friday's White House daily press briefing, since cameras were barred. (CNN sent its Supreme Court sketch artist, Bill Hennessy, to draw it instead.)

“I don’t think I need to do any further analysis than what the president himself said the intention was,” said Sean Spicer, White House press secretary, when asked about Trump’s lie. But even that wasn’t the end.

Sunday on ABC News’ “This Week,” Kellyanne Conway, counselor to the president, told George Stephanopoulos there still may be recordings.

“In that tweet, the president is making clear, as he often does on social media, George, that he’s leaving open the possibility that it could have happened,” she said. “Because you know the conversations he had with the heads of Mexico and Australia were leaked.”

During her interview, Earhardt praised Trump’s deceit. “That was a smart way to make sure he stayed honest in those hearings,” she fawned.

“Well, it wasn’t very stupid, I can tell you that,” Trump said.

That’s one way to look at it. According to 18 U.S. Code Section 1512, there’s an other name for such behavior: Witness intimidation.

Rob Burgess, Tribune city editor, may be reached at

rob.burgess@kokomotribune.com.